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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 004492

SIPDIS

EUCOM PASS TO ODC SPAIN

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: MEETING ON WITH DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER ON IRAQ,
AFGHANISTAN, SUBMARINE CONTRACTS

REF: STATE 236268

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathy Fitzpatrick; reason 1.5 (B) and (D).

1. (C) Summary. Deputy Defense Minister Francisco Pardo told Charge that the MOD will take the lead in promoting "excellent" bilateral ties between Spain and the U.S. Regarding the tender for the S-80 submarine weapons system, Pardo indicated a GOS decision would be forthcoming soon. He strongly implied that the GOS was leaning towards awarding the contract to one of the two U.S. bidders, but made clear that the MOD's decision was not yet final. On Iraq, Charge pressed the GOS to support common funding for the NATO training mission and to allow Spanish officers assigned to NATO commands to deploy to Iraq (REFTEL). Pardo stressed continuing GOS political sensitivities over Iraq, making clear that the Zapatero administration would be very leery of the deployment of Spanish forces to Iraq under any rubric. This tracks with what we have heard from Chief of Defense General Sanz and MOD Director General for Policy Admiral Torrente (the number three MOD official) in recent meetings. Pardo was slightly more flexible with respect to additional Spanish troop commitments to Afghanistan, saying no increases were contemplated but that the GOS could "study" new proposals.

2. (C) This meeting confirms reports that the GOS hopes to use defense issues to smooth relations with the USG. This bodes well for our core defense interest in Spain) continued unimpeded access to Spanish military bases. However, on political lightning rods such as Iraq, we see little chance of progress with the GOS, at least until the Iraq elections. In Afghanistan, Spain won't lead a PRT but they might be convinced to participate in one. End Summary.

//MOD WANTS TO PROMOTE STRONG TIES WITH USG//

3. (C) Deputy Defense Minister Pardo met with Charge on 11/22 accompanied by his chief of staff Jose Pablo Sabrido Fernandez and technical advisor General Juan Martin Villalon. Charge was accompanied by Political Counselor, Defense Attache, ODC, and poloff. Pardo led off by expressing the Zapatero Government's desire for improved relations with the USG, "relations that can only be good, very good, or excellent." He noted that, contrary to speculation in the press and by the opposition that Zapatero would be weak on defense issues, the Socialists have proven even stronger on defense than their Popular Party predecessors, submitting a request for a 4.2 percent increase in the defense budget for 2005. Pardo insisted that media claims of anti-American sentiments within the GOS were without foundation. He said the MOD was strongly in favor of close relations with the USG and would do what it could to cement bonds of friendship. Charge welcomed Pardo's comments and said the USG stands ready to improve bilateral relations.

//S-80 SUBMARINES: CLOSE TO A DECISION//

4. (C) The Charge raised the matter of the long-awaited GOS decision on the contract for weapons systems for Spain's two S-80 submarines. Pardo said the GOS was close to making a final decision, though he would not be pinned down on a specific timeframe. He said he understood the desire of both U.S. companies to get a rapid decision and, while he noted that there could be only one winner, he said that the USG likely would be "pleased" by the Spanish decision. (NOTE: Other defense sources have told us a decision would be announced within weeks, perhaps in early December. Pardo's forward-leaning comments are a positive sign, but we cannot be certain that either U.S. company will be awarded the contract. END NOTE.)

//IRAQ AND NATO//

5. (C) The Charge said the USG understands that the Zapatero administration will not be budged on the issue of deploying Spanish troops to Iraq, but requested Spanish flexibility on the issues of NATO funding and the participation in Iraq of Spanish forces assigned to NATO commands. Charge said it was our understanding that Spain had lifted its block on the use

of common NATO funds for housing construction to support the NATO mission in Iraq, but that Spain, along with Belgium, Germany, and France continued to block common funding of the APODS. He underscored the importance to the USG, NATO, and the international community in general of a successful rebuilding effort in Iraq. Pardo said he was not aware of the details of the debate in the NAC regarding the use of common funds, but would endeavor to find out. He assured the Charge that Spain's position was technical in nature and not due to political concerns.

16. (C) However, on the matter of deploying Spanish officers assigned to NATO commands, Pardo said political considerations were the key factor underlying Spanish concerns. He said the Iraq issue remained "polemic" in Spain and that the GOS was under strong public pressure to renounce the deployment of any Spanish forces to Iraq, regardless of whether they were sent by Madrid or by NATO headquarters. He asked for USG understanding of the political sensitivities involved. Asked whether the MOD, like the Spanish MFA, saw Iraq's January elections as a possible turning point that would permit greater Spanish activism, Pardo was noncommittal. Pardo said, however, the GOS was looking for "flexibility" on the issue of lifting the caveat on Spanish members of NATO commands to participate in the NATO training mission (NOTE: MOD number three, Admiral Torrente, told Polcouns Nov. 18 that the GOS would prefer not to be among the first from NATO commands to be deployed to Iraq. END NOTE).

//AFGHANISTAN//

17. (C) Charge said Spain and the USG should be proud of having worked with others in the international community to liberate Afghanistan from the Taliban. He thanked Pardo for Spain's participation thus far and said we would be looking to Madrid for additional commitments and hoped that Spain would make a decision on its participation in a PRT prior to the Force Generation Conference in Brussels next week. Pardo said that Spain was pleased with the role it had played in Afghanistan, but cautioned that the GOS did not contemplate additional deployments or new missions there. He said that in the Spanish political context, any deployment was potentially controversial and would require close consultations with Parliament. He said, though (also reflecting comments by Torrente) that the issue was still open regarding additional deployments or new missions such as a PRT.

//COMMENT//

18. (C) This meeting confirms other indications that the GOS hopes to use defense issues to smooth relations with the USG, friction that has left them open to opposition criticism that Zapatero is mishandling one of Spain's key relationships. Pardo is a good interlocutor and gave every indication of his readiness to engage in a positive manner. This bodes well for our core defense interest in Spain) continued unimpeded access to Spanish military bases. However, on political lightning rods such as Iraq, we see little chance of progress with the GOS, at least until the Iraq elections. In Afghanistan, meanwhile, Spain probably won't lead a PRT but they might be convinced to participate in one.
MANZANARES